

Katy Moffatt



THE MOST MEMORABLE AMERICAN ROOTS MUSIC—be it western, country, folk, rock or the blues—is always informed by a simple fact of life: you live and you learn. Just ask Katy Moffatt. Or better yet, listen to her sing, be it a song from her own prolific pen or a choice cut from a favorite songwriter. It’s clear that Katy sings and writes with the voice of hard-won authority. As BAM observes, “She doesn’t just hit the notes and get the words right, Moffatt evokes the emotions behind the tunes and meaning between the lines.”

In December 2013, Katy began recording what would be her 17th studio album. Spring 2017 brings to fruition and sets afoot *Where The Heart Is*, a culmination of her 40 years as a performing songwriter. Produced by Katy’s long-time friend and musical cohort, David Wilkie of Cowboy Celtic, and Butch Hause of Western Jubilee fame, it is a collection of 11 songs, with six new Katy originals and co-writes.

Throughout this tour-de-force of song and performance, producers Wilkie and Hause sync their own instrumental sensibilities to Katy’s passionate guitar work and exquisite vocals, adding special guest musicians and the pitch-perfect celestial harmonies of Denise Withnell. David Wilkie writes in his liner notes: “This is Katy at her finest. Raw, powerful, sweet and gentle. These are stories of sadness, madness, heartache, heartbreak, love & hate, courage & murder, assassination, exhilaration, bravery & slavery. It’s all here. I’ve never known anyone who has such a deep understanding of what makes a good song.”

Debuting in 1976 with *Katy* on Columbia Records, Moffatt has continued to grow and expand her own artistry so effectively that November 2002 saw the reissue of her first two Columbia albums on compact disc. In 2008, she participated by special invitation in a star-studded tribute to Les Paul presented by the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. 2009 brought yet another reissue: a two-CD set called *Trilogy*, comprised of three significant albums first released in the 1990’s. In 2010, the esteemed Dutch label, Strictly Country, announced the release of *Playing Fool*, a 15-song CD of performances, mostly duets, recorded live in Europe. Hers is a career marked by consistent critical acclaim, industry appreciation (a 1985 Academy of Country Music nomination as Best New Female Vocalist), movie appearances (*Billy Jack*, *Hard Country* and *The Thing Called Love*), songs covered (by talents such as Hoyt Axton and Janie Fricke), and an album that outsold Garth Brooks on the U.K. country charts (*The Greatest Show on Earth* a.k.a. *The Evangeline Hotel*, which stayed on those charts for six months).

But then again, Katy Moffatt has been learning her lessons well ever since she first became enthralled with music as a child growing up in Fort Worth. Captivated by Broadway show tunes, the Beatles and Motown, she was an avid listener to Top 40 radio and says, “I used to come home from school, have dinner, go to bed, and set the alarm for midnight. Then I’d get up and do my homework and listen to the radio. It was my favorite time—I could be alone with the music.” This she recalls in *Midnight Radio*, the title song of her lauded second Watermelon Records release of 1996, which was preceded by the 1995 Gavin Americana Chart success *Hearts Gone Wild*.

By high school, she was absorbing Tom Rush, Judy Collins and Leonard Cohen (whose ‘Dress Rehearsal Rag,’ Katy says, “made me want to perform”). Later, Tracy Nelson and Ella Fitzgerald, (whose version of the Cole Porter gem, ‘Miss Otis Regrets’ would later inspire Katy’s brilliant acoustic adaptation of the song on 1998’s *Angel Town*) became vocal touchstones for Moffatt, who recalls that “as soon as I started performing, I knew this was what I wanted to do. But there weren’t many places for a young girl to perform.” Early gigs included a small Ft. Worth coffeehouse, an old folks home (where her audience included Willie Nelson’s grandmother), and a Neiman-Marcus fashion show with a then-trendy folk music theme. During her college years in Santa Fe, she fronted blues and jugband groups, starred in her “one and only musical” (*The Fantastiks*), and was cast as a folksinger in *Billy Jack*. After college, she spent time in Austin opening shows for the likes of Jerry Jeff Walker and Willis Alan Ramsey before landing in Denver, where she was discovered by Columbia Records.

Her two Columbia albums *Katy* (produced by Billy Sherrill) and *Kissin’ in the California Sun* won rave notices from *Rolling Stone* and *Newsweek*, but the ever eclectic Moffatt found herself caught in the crossfire between country and pop divisions of a large corporate record company. “I started six albums, finished three, and two were released,” she recalls. “I often had marvelous opportunities and no way to maximize them.” Eventually, Katy found a greater satisfaction was to be had by simplifying: first, making records under her own terms, then making licensing agreements for them. “This made much more sense to me,” she adds. “It removed a tremendous disconnect.”

A move to California in 1979 landed her within a burgeoning community of like-minded country rockers, and after recording an album for Permian/MCA (yielding three single releases which earned her the ACM nomination), Moffatt appeared on the groundbreaking

“Well-crafted songs
frame her rich, thick
soprano . . . exquisite.”

—Dave Zimmerman, *USA Today*

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A Town South of Bakersfield compilation amid kindred spirits such as Dwight Yoakum and Rosie Flores. Three new film offers had her cast as a singing performer in *Hard Country* (with Michael Martin Murphey), *Honeymoon in Vegas*, and Peter Bogdanovich's *The Thing Called Love*. Sessions with Steve Berlin of Los Lobos yielded the album *Child Bride*, whose European release spurred Moffatt's growing popularity on the Continent. After meeting Tom Russell and his guitar playing side kick Andrew Hardin at the Kerrville Music Festival in Texas, she began an ongoing songwriting relationship with Russell, and recorded *Walkin' On The Moon* with Hardin, her first US album release in over a decade (on Philo/ Rounder in 1989), and hailed as "substantive in both its emotions and its ideas" by the *San Jose Mercury News*. Rounder followed it with the Stateside issue of *Child Bride* ("American songs delivered with full-throttled passion," noted *The Washington Post*) in 1990. *The Greatest Show on Earth* in 1993 ("One 'Greatest Show' well worth catching," said *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*) prompted legal action by Ringling Brothers circus, predicating a name change to *The Evangeline Hotel*, but by now Moffatt had reclaimed her place as one of America's most honest and affecting singer-songwriters. As the *Detroit News* and *Free Press* notes of Moffatt's songs, they "provide stirring, poignant and incisive glimpses into the lives of the long-suffering everyman and woman who once populated Springsteen's scenarios—except with a dusty Southwest spirit."

On her 1999 Hightone album, *Loose Diamond*, Katy teamed with Grammy winner Dave Alvin as her producer, together crafting a collection of songs delivering all the power and soul of her vocal prowess to the roots country audience. ("The kind of verve and style that should, by all rights, be the future of country," proclaimed Brian Baker of *Country Standard Time*.)

Over the years, Moffatt has enjoyed a career that's been as broad as her varied interests. In 1996, Rounder issued *Sleepless Nights*, her collaboration with traditional singer Kate Brislin. Later that year she was heard duetting with the legendary Country Dick Montana on his posthumously released solo album, *The Devil Lied To Me* (*Rolling Stone* magazine called her participation, a "vocal star turn.") She also contributed a track to the acclaimed songwriters' tribute to Merle Haggard, *Tulare Dust*, did time in The Pleasure Barons with Montana, Dave Alvin, Mojo Nixon, and John Doe, and in 1992 released *Dance Me Outside*, an album of duets with her brother, esteemed Nashville songwriter Hugh Moffatt.

Katy's 2001 adventurous foray into the Western music genre yielded *Cowboy Girl* (Western Jubilee Records) and found Moffatt traveling an old and dusty trail, one perhaps more deeply rooted in her than any she had traveled before. In the words of poet Paul Zarzyski, ". . . she sticks to each note, spurrin' pretty out into the purple sage and leaving us listeners dazzled by the soulful vistas across which her voice ranges with ease, with grace, with a gritty musical savvy that turns us into believers."

After some 30 years of solo performances from New York to Vancouver, from London to the Blue Mountains of Australia, Katy delivered her first live solo offering, *Up Close and Personal*, released by Fuel/UMVD Records in 2005, is yet another very special collection of music fulfilling an expressed desire of aficionados the world over.

Fewer Things, released on Zeppelin Records in 2008, is a third addition to the luminous canon of unique acoustic collaborations between Katy Moffatt and Andrew Hardin which include the revered *Walkin' on the Moon* (1989) and 1998's *Angel Town* ("Anyone unaffected should check their pulse" —*Mojo*). Produced by Hardin and lauded by *No Depression* as "An artistic triumph," *Fewer Things* is a collection of 11 songs with five originals. Other gems include previously undiscovered songs from John Hiatt and Pat McLaughlin as well as muscular contributions by Stephen Bruton and Nick Lowe.

In 2012, encouraged by a former history professor who noted Moffatt's attention to historical detail in many of her songs, Katy developed a musical and spoken-word solo performance piece, *Midnight Radio: A One-Woman Show*. Debuting in 2013, it is Katy's edifying, always entertaining musical journey through 19th, 20th and 21st Century American life, highlighting the role of women and the power of radio through songs of personal history and the telling of history through song. This evolving one-woman show is the history of a woman, all women, and a nation, and garners raves with every presentation.

Early 2016 brought the completion of *Now and Then*, a second collection of duets with Katy's brother Hugh. This newly-fashioned family jewel exploring the siblings' musical history preceded an extensive and successful duo tour through four European countries.

Now, with the release of her 17th studio album, *Where The Heart Is*—which many consider her finest work to date—Katy continues her unique path, cutting through to a place where the honesty, power, and purity of her sound and spirit reside and flourish like a wild rose.



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Samples of many of
Katy's songs can be heard
on sites such as
allmusic.com, *YouTube*,
or *iTunes*.